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Chairman: Mr. Kuchinsky ..... (Ukraine)
later: Ms. Groux (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Switzerland)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 93: Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/59/115 and 120)

Agenda item 94: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/59/73)

(a) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/59/176)

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Agenda item 95: Follow-up to the International Decade of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (*continued*) (A/59/164)

1. **Mr. Ocampo** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the items, said that the Commission for Social Development, as the primary intergovernmental body responsible for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development, would conduct an important review of the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

2. The realization of a people-centred approach to development was predicated not only on better living conditions and civic participation in the public policies designed to achieve that improvement, but also on poverty eradication, the attainment of full employment and enhanced social integration. In addition, that approach called for closer integration of economic and social policies, yet the incorporation of social goals in macroeconomic and general economic policies was far from a priority on national and international agendas, despite the fact that progress towards social goals depended on supportive and coherent economic policies at both levels. The Social Summit and the special session had underscored that national and international public agencies should always keep social and economic goals in mind when elaborating and implementing their policies.

3. While it had become clear that sustained and broad-based economic growth was critical to poverty reduction, other fundamental aspects of development must be borne in mind when formulating policy, if the causes of poverty were to be addressed. Without innovative conceptual and operational frameworks ensuring the balanced integration of economic and social policies, political commitment was unlikely to translate into integrated policy approaches. Concerns about the impact of globalization were central to such integration, since globalization could offer new opportunities for sustained economic growth, but it could likewise pose threats to human well-being. Although, in 2000, Governments had acknowledged that urgent action was required in order to realize the full potential of opportunities to benefit all, globalization was surrounded by growing controversy, and security issues currently loomed large on the international agenda. Intergovernmental attention should therefore focus as a matter of priority on the report entitled "A fair globalization: creating opportunities for all" issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO) World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (A/59/98-E/2004/79).

4. Even though it was widely accepted that the primary responsibility for social development lay with countries and States, the exercise of that responsibility was being hampered by many countries' weak institutional and administrative capacity to design, implement and monitor social policies and programmes and by the loss of national policy-making autonomy as public authorities became part of a globalized and interdependent world economy. At the same time, heavier fiscal and political constraints on Governments had resulted in a reduction in State programmes and activities. Social development therefore required systematic efforts at all levels of policy-making to place people at the centre of public strategies and actions. Such an approach was a condition for progress towards the goals contained in the Millennium Declaration. The social aspects of globalization, the contribution of economic policies to social-development goals and the capacity of Governments to define and implement their own social policies were related problems of crucial relevance to the search for

equity and to poverty reduction and, as such, they deserved particular attention in the review.

5. With regard to the question of persons with disabilities, the goal of providing all social groups with the opportunity to contribute to society was linked to the people-centred approach and constituted one of the cornerstones of social integration and socially inclusive development. For more than two decades the United Nations had been at the forefront of promoting the equality of persons with disabilities and their full participation in the social, economic and political life of their countries. Nevertheless much more still needed to be done to remove barriers to social equity at national and international levels if the social protection of people with disabilities was to be enhanced, since that group of people continued to suffer from discrimination and lower standards of living. Significant progress had, however, been made towards that objective since the decision had been taken to draw up an international convention on the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities and, in that context, consideration should also be given to devising innovative policy instruments that would contribute to the successful implementation of the convention.

6. The wide-ranging implications of population ageing for economic, social and political development meant that a well-thought-out policy response geared to enhancing the participation of older people in the development process was clearly needed. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing provided the framework for national and international efforts and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was striving to provide technical assistance to support national capacity-building and the mainstreaming of ageing into policy formulation. Experience from many countries suggested that it was not easy to achieve social equity or to integrate the disadvantaged into society, although both objectives were crucial to greater empowerment, more social solidarity and closer social cohesion, all of which formed the underpinnings for successful economic outcomes that would in turn reinforce the virtuous circle of development.

7. The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family was an occasion for recalling the importance of the original principles and objectives of the Year and for evaluating achievements, one of the most far-reaching of which was the creation of a greater awareness of what families contributed to economic development and social advancement in societies all over the world. Progress had also been secured through Member States' programmes of action through which efforts were being made to integrate family perspectives into national legislation, policy formulation and programme development. A regional conference on the Family in Africa had been held in Benin in July 2004 with the active support of his department and another conference in Qatar was planned later in the same year. Research on issues concerning the family was informing and enriching policies and programmes, while collaboration across the United Nations system was promoting the emergence of a framework for global action. Civil society was mobilizing in support of families and there were signs that the well-being of families had become an important focus of all those concerned with national development and poverty eradication. It was, however, still essential to provide expertise and appropriate technical support on family issues and to continue advocacy of those issues. Of the three core issues identified by the World Summit for Social Development, namely poverty eradication, employment creation and social integration, the latter two were often left out of the current policy debate. The Third Committee therefore had special responsibility in securing their re-inclusion in the development discourse so as to ensure the implementation of the Copenhagen Commitments and the achievement of the development goals set forth in the Millennium Declaration.

8. **Mr. Lorenzo** (Dominican Republic) said that, while poverty reduction had been widely discussed over the previous two years, he wondered how social development could be promoted when corruption and a lack of transparency often made it impossible for civil society to participate in government decisions. He was also sceptical that growth could be spurred at a time when oil prices were soaring. He likewise wished to know how the Global Compact was mobilizing resources through partnership between civil society, the private sector and Governments.

9. **Mr. Hof** (Netherlands) asked for more information about ways of improving the integration of employment issues and social cohesion into the Millennium Development Goals in the run-up to the review summit. The European Union agreed that priority attention should be devoted to the report entitled "A fair globalization: creating opportunities for all" produced by the ILO World Commission on the

Social Dimension of Globalization, and he would therefore like to hear how greater attention could be paid to the report in the Third Committee and in the Commission for Social Development. Lastly he asked if the review of the Copenhagen Commitments and of the twenty-fourth special session would focus on the report.

10. **Mr. Ocampo** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) replied that poverty reduction did not depend on economic growth alone, but that income distribution was likewise a critical determinant. In many cases, growth had had a limited impact owing to rising inequality. On the other hand, major advances in poverty alleviation had always been associated with a broadly based process of economic growth and the Millennium Development Goals could not be achieved without it, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where growth rates were below the requisite 6 to 7 per cent a year. Although economic growth did have a critical influence on income and employment, it did not always lead to poverty alleviation. The latter was, however, an economic issue and should therefore be at the centre of any agenda.

11. Turning to the question of oil prices, he said that, according to some estimates, an extra $10 per barrel would shave half to one percentage point off world economic growth in the coming two years. There was, however, no knowing whether the current increase would be permanent. The monetary policies traditionally adopted to counteract the inflation triggered by higher oil prices tended to depress economic activity. Part of the slowdown in the world economy noted in the second quarter of the current year was associated with oil prices, but the effect of monetary policies had yet to be felt and two major economic areas had not increased their interest rates. It was therefore to be hoped that the adverse effect of tighter monetary policies would not be too strong, although a number of other risks to the world economy were likely to lead to slower growth the following year, one being the jobless economic recovery which had taken place to date.

12. The ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization had been right to place a strong emphasis on the role of employment in social progress. If strong economic growth was to have beneficial social effects, it would have to have a positive influence on employment. Hence there could be no rapid reduction in poverty without an improvement in the quantity and quality of employment. Although the Millennium Development Goals had not placed much emphasis on social integration, the forthcoming review of the outcome of the World Summit and the twenty-fourth special session would offer an excellent opportunity to reassert the central role that the three main objectives of Copenhagen played in fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals.

13. **Mr. Cumberbach Miguén** (Cuba) said that the distribution of wealth was of crucial importance for eradicating poverty, creating employment and social integration and analysing the social impact of globalization. He would therefore like to know what role the United Nations and other multilateral bodies should play in ensuring a better distribution of wealth worldwide that would further enhance social development nationally and internationally by levelling out disparities between different nations.

14. **Ms. Abeysekere** (Sri Lanka) enquired about the possibility of reconciling the effects of globalization with people-centred development. In her opinion, globalization was not a natural phenomenon but was directed by human decisions. The villagers in the global village were unequal. Did the United Nations see any way out of that dilemma? How could development be people-centred when all efforts at stemming the worst effects of globalization seemed to be futile?

15. **Mr. Ocampo** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that recent studies had demonstrated that the worsening trend in the distribution of wealth within countries was a widespread phenomenon in almost all the member States of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and in most developing countries, save for some notable exceptions in Africa. In contrast, trends in the exploitation of development potential had diverged widely over the previous 25 years, with some very poor countries forging ahead and other middle-income countries failing to do so. A comparison of both trends had fuelled a debate as to whether worldwide wealth distribution had really worsened, since India and China had offset that trend.

16. In response to the question about making development people-centred, he took the view that it was necessary to look at the openings offered by globalization. Some of the countries which had done

best economically had exploited those openings. For that reason, Governments' room for manoeuvre to adopt policies to manage the risks posed by globalization was critical, for globalization provided many opportunities in the shape of international trade, the management of migration flows, the use of technology developed elsewhere and the additional flows of capital that could be tapped on the international markets. The ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization had therefore emphasized that the answer lay not so much in condemning globalization as in using it for social development.

17. **Ms. Bertrand** (Joint Inspection Unit) presented the main issues contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on achieving the universal-primary-education goal of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/59/76 and Add.1 and Corr.1). The purpose of the report was to complement the monitoring of the education Millennium Development Goals, namely to ensure that all boys and girls would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels by 2015.

18. The first issue was the underestimation of the importance of education, particularly primary education, and its value in attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Education needed to be given higher priority at the national and international levels. That required renewed political commitments, more domestic and external resources for education, reforms, increased official development assistance and better external assistance.

19. The second issue was better and increased cooperation of the United Nations organizations working in education, a division of labour based on comparative advantage, more sharing of and learning from best practices, joint evaluations with partner countries, and investing in institutional memory. The report described the strategies and activities of the main actors in education, in particular the United Nations system. The quality of cooperation and partnership among all actors — bilateral, multilateral, the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions, partner countries and civil society — was essential and must be improved. There was therefore a need for better coordination within national development plans and poverty-reduction strategies.

20. The third issue was the integration of social policies, particularly education plans, into wider, national development plans and poverty-reduction strategies. The report recommended capacity-building at all levels and that United Nations organizations with recognized expertise in human development and social policy should increase their interaction with the Bretton Woods institutions, particularly in the elaboration of national development plans and poverty-reduction strategies. The United Nations instruments — the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework — must also be more closely interlinked with national plans.

21. The fourth issue was the need to increase knowledge about the quality of education, by investing in statistical capacity-building and helping Member States improve the quality of education through the assessment of learning outcomes. One of the main conclusions of the report was the lack of robust data on the status of education owing to weak statistical capacity in many developing countries. The estimated number of children out of school varied from 107 to 120 million, depending on the report concerned. However, if estimates included all the children "missing out on education" — in other words, children out of school, children who went to school but dropped out, children who went to school but did not complete, and children who completed but did not learn anything — the number would rise to 30 to 40 per cent of children of primary-school age in developing countries. It was a very important issue, given that those children would be the illiterate adults of tomorrow.

22. There were conflicting data on external assistance to education; the situation needed to be rectified, as it was essential to have comprehensive, comparable data. Regarding monitoring, the report recommended that the United Nations organizations should keep the governing bodies informed concerning their contribution to the Millennium Development Goals.

23. The sixth issue concerned monitoring of commitments and avoiding overloads. Many plans had failed because commitments had not been monitored properly; it was therefore very important to monitor progress, assess implementation and review strategies in order to avoid yet more failure. The report proposed that the Economic and Social Council should consider organizing, in 2006 or 2007, a review of the poverty-

reduction strategies of the United Nations system as part of the comprehensive review of the Millennium Declaration.

24. She urged the Committee to keep the report on the agenda both during the current session and during the 2005 review of the Millennium Declaration.

25. *Ms. Groux (Switzerland), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

26. **Mrs. Faye** (Senegal) asked what strategy would be used to achieve the two goals in developing countries, particularly in Africa, which African countries had seen improvements, and how the lack of data for developing countries would be tackled.

27. **Ms. Bertrand** (Joint Inspection Unit) said that Senegal was one of the countries best known for investing in education. The International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002 had made it clear that, while primary responsibility for education rested with Governments, responsibility also lay with the international community. In 2000, the participants in the World Education Forum in Dakar had made a solemn pledge that no countries seriously committed to education for all would be thwarted in their achievement of that goal by a lack of resources. That had been interpreted as a commitment by the international donor community and by the United Nations system to help Governments in need with resources and technical assistance. One positive development was that the focus of the so-called Fast-Track Initiative of the World Bank had been broadened to encompass the education-for-all goals. Experience in developing countries showed that data collection was a formidable task; more resources were therefore needed for statistical capacity-building.

28. **Mr. Effah-Apenteng** (Ghana) said that the global social situation had deteriorated even further since the holding of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, both of which would be reviewed in 2005. Despite unprecedented progress, there was still massive human deprivation. According to the *Human Development Report 2004*, over 800 million people were undernourished, more than a billion lived on less than $1 a day, and some 100 million children were out of school.

29. Global policies and programmes were not yielding the expected results of poverty eradication. His country therefore welcomed the report of the ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, issued in February 2004 (see document A/59/120, para. 16), which examined the social failures of globalization and discussed how to address the imbalances of globalization and how to place people at the heart of that process. He hoped that the report would inspire Member States to honour their commitments.

30. Despite developing countries' determination to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, national development policies seemed to be failing owing to the unfavourable international economic environment and inadequate official development assistance and foreign direct investment. Most developing countries were therefore unable to achieve the 3 per cent economic growth required. The situation was aggravated by HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases which further eroded already limited resources.

31. His country therefore supported calls for a real transformation of the global economic environment and urged developed countries to sincerely commit themselves to the development principles reached at Doha by widening market access, providing more trade-related assistance and increasing development assistance and investments.

32. Despite the economic challenges at the international level, his country was determined to stay on course and was currently focusing on five priority areas: developing infrastructure, modernizing agriculture through rural development, improving social services, strengthening the private sector and strengthening institutions of good governance. Special attention was also being paid to the education sector. The ultimate national goal was eradication of poverty; however, his Government understood that poverty went beyond "lack of money" and was therefore addressing a whole range of issues. He was confident that his country was on course to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, but nonetheless called for ongoing international support.

33. His delegation welcomed United Nations system strategies aimed at implementing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. He stressed the importance of integrating ageing issues into national development plans and programmes, but warned that such efforts would be unsuccessful without the requisite capacity. He therefore called on Member

States to support the Department of Social and Economic Affairs' capacity-building programmes. He also noted that the regional action plan on ageing lacked the necessary implementation strategies; his country would support efforts to rectify the situation, as technical cooperation was crucial.

34. His delegation remained concerned about the deteriorating situation of the family, and therefore reiterated its support for international initiatives on the matter. The national, regional and international activities to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family should be actively pursued to prevent further deterioration.

35. His delegation welcomed the fact that the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities had commended negotiations on a convention. While acknowledging the importance of careful drafting, he urged all delegations to take the necessary steps to facilitate the process.

36. Lastly, he reaffirmed his Government's commitment to implementing the Copenhagen Programme of Action and attaining the Millennium Development Goals, but pointed out that, like many developing countries, his country relied on genuine partnerships and effective international cooperation.

37. **Ms. Erard** (Switzerland) said that the international community had made a commitment to placing people at the heart of social development. The commitments made in Copenhagen in 1995, reiterated in Geneva in 2000 and further reinforced by the Millennium Development Goals, were just as relevant in today's world where exclusion and poverty persisted.

38. Her country believed it was essential to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights and good governance, fair global growth, a favourable climate for investment and the creation of decent work based on market liberalization and fair rules. Such principles were crucial to reducing poverty and to promoting full and decent employment and social integration. A solidarity-based social policy was key to ensuring social cohesion and the participation of marginalized sectors of the population.

39. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit on Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/59/120) and his analysis of the work of the Commission for Social Development.

40. With regard to evaluating the social aspects of globalization, the Secretary-General's concerns largely corresponded with the conclusions of the report of the ILO World Commission. Her country proposed taking account of those conclusions when addressing his concerns.

41. With regard to ensuring the compatibility of macroeconomic policies with and their contribution to social development goals, her country endorsed in particular the proposal concerning the need to integrate the economic, social and environmental aspects to national and international development policies.

42. At the institutional level, such an approach required greater integration and more coherence between the economic and social policies practised by the United Nations and ILO, on the one hand, and by the international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization, on the other. Her country favoured such an approach.

43. At the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, her country had proposed a multilateral initiative between ILO, the Bretton Woods institutions, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and civil-society representatives. Her delegation continued to believe that such an initiative was important.

44. It was also important to ensure effective follow-up of social-development commitments within United Nations bodies. Her country had therefore called for an exchange of information between the various functional commissions in order to streamline work. Her delegation welcomed the meeting held in July 2004 and encouraged the chairmen of the functional commissions to step up such exchanges in the future.

45. With regard to strengthening the capacity of Governments to define and implement their own social policies, each State was responsible for implementing adequate social policies. Sustainable social development required conditions favourable to social dialogue, the introduction of balanced social-security systems and decent working conditions. It was therefore essential to continue the dialogue on corporate social responsibility.

46. **Mr. Tarp** (Denmark) said that significant progress had been made in the negotiations for a convention on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities at the recent fourth session of the Ad Hoc Committee, but some core issues were still to be negotiated. His Government hoped that the Committee would recommend the continuation of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee for two sessions of two weeks each in 2005. The process leading to the conclusion of the convention would provide a strong focus on disability issues for Governments, and would be an opportunity to prepare national legislation and procedures for its implementation.

47. He urged all Member States to participate actively in the negotiations for the convention by appointing representatives of disabled persons' organizations to their delegations and by contributing to the Voluntary Fund for the Convention.

48. **Mr. Friis** (Denmark), speaking as a youth representative of his delegation, said that only a handful of nations had met the target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product for official development assistance, yet it was pivotal to live up to that responsibility in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals. An investment in children and young people, through investment in social infrastructure such as education and health care, would pay off by generating economic and social development.

49. The role of children and young people as a resource for society was often overlooked, along with their right to participate, which was emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regional seminars for youth could make a useful contribution to the evaluation of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals to be conducted in 2005.

50. **Mr. Hayee** (Pakistan) said that the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/59/120) provided a grim reminder that the three core issues raised at the Summit — poverty eradication, job creation and strengthening of the social fabric — remained elusive. Nine years later, the situation of the 1 billion people living in abject poverty was largely the same. The enabling environment called for at the Summit had not been realized. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General's recommendation that people must be placed at the centre of public strategies and actions. A strengthened North-South partnership was also necessary in order to achieve common goals. To that end, his Government had launched a five-year social-action programme, with the assistance of foreign donors, as a large-scale effort to improve the management and delivery of social services.

51. The family had been recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the fundamental unit of society founded by a man and a woman of full age exercising their right to marry, and that concept had been embedded in all subsequent human rights instruments and covenants. Although the form of the family had been evolving, its definition had never changed, and those who wished to elevate other forms of union to the status of family were violating the provisions of the Declaration and the right of the family to comprehensive support and protection. His delegation would like to see the strengthening of the United Nations Programme on the Family within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in order to support the mainstreaming of the family in its work.

52. Pakistan attached great importance to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and had taken action to enhance social support for its elderly population. It was in the process of preparing its national report on implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, and had taken many steps on the path towards sustained growth and development.

53. **Ms. Haakestad** (Norway), speaking as a youth representative of her delegation, said that although slavery had been abolished, human beings were still being traded and exploited. Every day, women and children were sold and forced into a life where their bodies were used through prostitution or as a source of cheap labour. Trafficking in women and children must be fought by attacking its root causes: poverty, which deprived women of education for employment, and armed conflict, which allowed trafficking to thrive in the power vacuum that often arose in post-conflict situations. Trafficking also highlighted the fact that in many societies, equal opportunity for women was still just a dream.

54. Although the State had the primary responsibility to eradicate that scourge, international action was also called for. A first step was the universal ratification, without reservation, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women. Trafficking must also be fought through adequate financial and social support to victims, training for law enforcement, legal reform, information campaigns, assistance for repatriation and rehabilitation of trafficking victims, and combating sex tourism. The adoption in 2000 of a protocol against trafficking in persons had been an important step; it must be ratified and enforced, and cross-border law-enforcement cooperation must be enhanced.

55. Important contributions towards halting the trade in sexual services could be made at the national level as well. For example, Norway had introduced a code of conduct for government employees prohibiting the purchase of sexual services while on official business abroad. A similar code of conduct for military personnel serving in international operations had been adopted by NATO.

56. **Ms. Flore** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that education was one of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Education opened the way to democracy, peace and development. Literacy enabled men and women to adapt to the modern world and assimilate the ideas that led to development.

57. In Côte d'Ivoire, over half of all adults were illiterate, of whom women represented two thirds. Accordingly, the Government was focusing on adult basic education as a means of reducing poverty and raising the standard of living through programmes designed to reach all vulnerable sectors of society. Women's education centres had been established to provide vocational training along with literacy. As illiteracy was highest in rural areas, the Institute of Applied Linguistics was working on the transcription of national languages with a view to their use in literacy programmes.

58. Although much remained to be done, her country had high hopes that literacy would become a useful development tool, despite the social and political situation which made access to some areas of the country difficult.

59. **Mr. Al-Khoshail** (Saudi Arabia) said that his Government was committed to social development through development plans in the areas of human resources, social-welfare programmes and vocational training for disabled persons. It had established social-development centres throughout the country in order to implement those programmes. Because of armed conflict and other developments in the region over the past two decades, the Government had invested significant resources in programmes to raise the standard of living of its citizens.

60. Unfortunately, advances in science and technology had not provided equal benefits to all the peoples in the world. In the view of his Government, adherence to religious values was the only way to achieve peace and security in society.

61. **Mr. Gospodinov** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) drew attention to the report the Secretary-General had made to the Commission for Social Development on public-sector effectiveness. As the Secretary-General had noted, the withdrawal of the public sector from many traditional fields of activity should be of special concern. An immediate result of that withdrawal was the worsening situation of the most vulnerable populations. Governments must understand the importance of building a strong relationship with their national Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, which were auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.

62. There had been a marked decline in resources allocated to social development in virtually all countries, but reductions in expenditure on education, for example, had hit hardest in the countries which could least afford it. The same was true for health care, welfare programmes and housing.

63. At the next session of the Commission, IFRC would stress the importance of the participation of affected groups in the development of national social strategies. One such example was the participation of youth in social development planning. Volunteers could also have a positive impact on many situations. For example, they were reaching out to young people in South Africa, where over 25 per cent of the population between ages 15 and 49 were living with HIV/AIDS, in an effort to improve prevention, knowledge and attitudes.

64. The elderly were also often neglected by State welfare and health services, and in Hong Kong, the Red Cross had engaged older people as volunteers to reach out to others in their age group. Youth and volunteer involvement were imperative for national growth, not to mention the Millennium Development Goals. Such collaboration should become a regular feature of the design and implementation of programmes.

65. IFRC saw social development as a set of issues that must be mainstreamed into other debates, which would become increasingly important as the expected decline in investment in the social sector continued.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.